



PRESS RELEASE
*Office of the United States Attorney
Middle District of Florida*

PAUL I. PEREZ
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

400 North Tampa Street
Suite 3200
Tampa, Florida 33602
813/274-6000
813/274-6300 (Fax)

300 North Hogan Street
Suite 700
Jacksonville, Florida 32201
904/301-6300
904/301-6310 (Fax)

501 W. Church Street
Suite 300
Orlando, Florida 32805
407/648-7500
407/648-7643 (Fax)

2110 First Street,
Suite 3-137
Fort Myers, Florida 33901
239/461-2200
239/461-2219 (fax)

Contact: Steve Cole ♦ Public Affairs Specialist ♦ 813/274-6352

For Immediate Release

February 10, 2005

Members of Garcia Drug Organization Receive Hefty Sentences

Paul I. Perez, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Florida, announces that brothers Ernesto Garcia, 43; Miguel Garcia 39; and Jesus Garcia 33 were sentenced today for their roles in a long term drug smuggling conspiracy involving marijuana and cocaine by United States District Judge John E. Steele. Ernesto Garcia of Brownsville, Texas and Miguel Garcia of Port Charlotte, Florida, who led the drug smuggling operation, were each sentenced to 328 months in Federal prison. The Court sentenced Jesus Garcia of Lehigh Acres, Florida, to 262 months in Federal prison. The Court sentenced another member of the organization, Juan Reyes, 36, also of Port Charlotte, Florida, to 137 months for his role in the conspiracy. The defendants were indicted and arrested on March 3, 2004, and pled guilty on October 7, 2004.

According to court documents, the conspiracy, which began in the early 1990's, involved the importation of marijuana into the United States at the Texas/Mexico

border. Marijuana was then hauled via SUV's and tractor trailer rigs to south west Florida and off-loaded at a ranch in eastern Lee County, before being supplied to distributors who sold it from Naples to Brandon, all in the Middle District of Florida. From about 1997 to 1999, other conspirators included approximately 30 members of the Latin Kings in Fort Myers who distributed marijuana supplied by the Garcia organization. Gang members traded from 10 - 20 stolen weapons to the Garcia's in exchange for marijuana according to one witness, a former gang member who is currently serving a 12 year state sentence for gang related activity.

In about 2001, the smugglers began focusing their attention on cocaine, which they smuggled in a similar fashion from the Texas/Mexico border to south west Florida. Once in south west Florida, the cocaine would be "re-rocked," a process whereby non-cocaine additive would be added to the substance to increase it's volume and its profitability.

After a six-day sentencing hearing during which the United States Attorney's Office introduced evidence including testimony by former conspirators, telephone conversations among conspirators intercepted via a state authorized wire tap obtained by Attorney General Charlie Crist, Office of Statewide Prosecution in Fort Myers, information from a tracking device placed by Federal agents on defendant Miguel Garcia's 1997 Buick LeSabre, and a compilation of video tapes made by a camera concealed by Federal agents at a storage facility in Lee County, Florida, the Court found that the conspiracy had engaged in smuggling and distribution activities involving at least 5000 kilograms of marijuana and at least 150 kilograms of cocaine. The illegal drugs were distributed from Naples to Brandon, all in the Middle District of Florida.

As part of this investigation and prosecution, agents seized approximately \$370,000 in cash, expensive automobiles and real property in Florida and Texas, all of which have been forfeited.

This case was investigated by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, both in Fort Myers and Brownsville, Texas; in conjunction with the Collier County Sheriff's Department, the Lee County Sheriff's Office, Combined Law Enforcement Against Narcotics (C.L.E.A.N.) Task Force, Charlotte County Sheriff's Office, Florida Highway Patrol (FHP), and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE).

This case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Robert Barclift and Jesus Casas.